AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method for protecting an item of private information in a database, wherein the method comprises:

receiving the item of private information, wherein the item of private information is used as a key for retrieving data from the database;

creating a hash of the item of private information at a database, wherein creating the hash further comprises checking a column attribute for a column, which stores the item of private information, in the database to determine that "privacy" is enabled for the column, and only upon privacy being enabled for the column, creating the hash, and wherein the hash is a one-way hash; and

storing the hash of the item of private information in the database, wherein the hash of the item of private information is a unique lookup key within the database, and wherein the item of private information does not exist in the database in plain-text form.

2. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein creating the hash can include creating at least one of a Secure Hash Algorithm-1 (SHA-1) and a Message-Digest algorithm 5 (MD5) hash.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the hash of the item of private information is created by the database in a manner that is transparent to an application which manipulates the private information.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein processing a query containing the private information involves:

receiving the item of private information;

creating a hash of the item of private information; and

querying the database using the hash of the item of private information.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the item of private information can include one of:

a social security number;

a driver's license number;

a passport number;

an email address;

a person's name; and

a person's mother's maiden name.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein multiple items of private information can be combined prior to creating the hash.

7 (Canceled).

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the database is a Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) database.

9. (Currently amended) A computer-readable storage medium storing instructions that when executed by a computer cause the computer to perform a method for protecting an item of private information in a database, wherein the method comprises:

receiving the item of private information, wherein the item of private information is used as a key for retrieving data from the database;

creating a hash of the item of private information at a database, wherein creating the hash further comprises checking a column attribute for a column, which stores the item of private information, in the database to determine that "privacy" is enabled for the column, and only upon privacy being enabled for the column, creating the hash, and wherein the hash is a one-way hash; and

storing the hash of the item of private information in the database, wherein the hash of the item of private information is a unique lookup key within the database, and wherein the item of private information does not exist in the database in plain-text form.

10. (Previously presented) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein creating the hash can include creating at least one of a Secure Hash Algorithm-1 (SHA-1) and a Message-Digest algorithm 5 (MD5) hash

11. (Original) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein the hash of the item of private information is created by the database in a manner that is transparent to an application which manipulates the private information.

12. (Original) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein processing a query containing the private information involves:

receiving the item of private information;

creating a hash of the item of private information; and

querying the database using the hash of the item of private information.

13. (Original) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein the item of private information can include one of:

a social security number;
a driver's license number;
a passport number;
an email address;
a person's name; and
a person's mother's maiden name.

14. (Original) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein multiple items of private information can be combined prior to creating the hash.

15 (Canceled).

16. (Original) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 9, wherein the database is a Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) database.

17-24 (Cancelled).